United Nations A/55/368

General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 September 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 24
Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 13 of General Assembly resolution 54/7 of 25 October 1999.

II. Consultations between representatives of the United Nations and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and representation at meetings

2. On 1 October 1999, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) held their annual coordinating meeting at United Nations Headquarters to discuss the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, in particular those items of concern and interest to OIC. The Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Political Affairs, represented the Secretary-General in this meeting and senior members of the Department participated in the meeting as observers.

3. As in previous years, the coordinating meeting reviewed the international political situation, with a special emphasis on issues relevant to the States members of OIC, including the Middle East and the question of Palestine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the situation in Afghanistan, Somalia, the situation relating to Nagorny Karabakh, and the consequences of the Iraqi occupation of and aggression against Kuwait.

4. The Assistant Secretary-General represented the Secretary-General at the twenty-seventh session of Foreign Ministers, which was convened by OIC at Kuala Lumpur from 27 to 30 June 2000.

5. During the period under review, the United Nations and OIC continued their consultations on political matters, especially concerning ongoing peacemaking efforts, which have become an important dimension in the cooperation between the two organizations. The secretaries-general of the two organizations had a number of bilateral meetings during the period, at which they discussed, inter alia, the situations in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Kosovo, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Both

* In accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/248, sect. C, para. 1, this report is being submitted on 8 September so as to include all contributions from the United Nations system.

00-63823 (E) 051000

organizations continue to hold regular consultations, in particular at the level of the Department of Political Affairs and the Permanent Observer Mission of OIC to the United Nations, on a number of issues of mutual concern. A high-level exchange of views on political matters is scheduled for September 2000.

6. With regard to the conflict in Afghanistan, both organizations remained in very close contact and intensified their political cooperation. The Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Afghanistan, Francesc Vendrell, participated as an observer in two rounds of indirect talks with the United Front and the Taliban that were convened by the OIC Committee for Afghanistan. These meetings were held from 7 to 9 March and 8 to 10 May 2000 at Jeddah, the headquarters of OIC. Prior to the first round of these talks, the Secretary-General conferred with representatives of the OIC Committee for Afghanistan at United Nations Headquarters. On 1 March 2000, the members of the OIC Committee, which is chaired by the Islamic Republic of Iran, briefed the Secretary-General on their activities. They, inter alia, expressed appreciation for the close cooperation between OIC and the United Nations and informed the Secretary-General that the efforts by OIC regarding Afghanistan were of a complementary nature, in support of the central role of the United Nations in the search for a peaceful resolution of the long-lasting Afghan conflict.

III. General meeting of the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its specialized institutions

7. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/7, a general meeting on cooperation between representatives of the secretariats of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna, from 11 to 13 July 2000. Substantive preparations for this meeting were initiated by the coordinating secretariats of the United Nations and OIC. In accordance with the agreement between the two secretariats, the meeting adopted the following agenda:

1. Organization of work.

2. Review of cooperation and appraisal of progress achieved in priority areas of cooperation:

(a) Development of science and technology;

(b) Trade and development;

(c) Technical cooperation among Islamic countries;

(d) Assistance to refugees;

(e) Food security and agriculture;

(f) Education and eradication of illiteracy;

(g) Investment mechanisms and joint ventures;

(h) Human resources development;

(i) Environment, health and population;

(j) Development of arts and crafts and promotion of heritage.

3. Consideration of proposals for enhancing the mechanisms of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its institutions.

4. Other matters.

5. Adoption of the final report.

8. The meeting had before it working papers prepared by the participating organizations, agencies and institutions of the two organizations. The 10 issues listed under agenda item 2 above constitute the agreed priority areas of cooperation between the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized agencies. During the meeting, informal working groups composed of representatives of the United Nations system and OIC and its specialized institutions were established. Based on the discussions in these working groups, which centred around the working papers prepared by the two organizations, the general meeting, inter alia, reached agreement on a wide-ranging programme of cooperative activities to be accomplished in the period 2000-2001. The conclusions and recommendations of the meeting were contained in its final report, which was unanimously adopted on 13 July 2000. Under agenda item 3, the meeting also discussed proposals for enhancing the mechanisms of cooperation between OIC and the United Nations system. It was, inter alia, agreed that concrete proposals, including a possible revision of the list of priority areas of cooperation, should be considered directly between the concerned entities of the two

organizations and that the secretariats of the two organizations should be informed accordingly prior to the next general meeting.

9. Representatives of the following departments of the United Nations and other organizations and agencies of the United Nations system participated in the meeting: Department of Political Affairs; Department of Public Information; secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Drug Control Programme; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); World Food Programme (WFP); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); World Health Organization (WHO); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the World Bank; World Meteorological Organization (WMO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD); and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

10. Representatives of the following organizations and institutions of OIC participated in the meeting: OIC General Secretariat; Department of Economic Affairs; Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT); Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC); Islamic Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO); Islamic Institute of Technology (IIT); Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA); Islamic Solidarity Fund (ISF); and Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI).

IV. Follow-up action on recommendations of the meetings between the United Nations system and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, including cooperation in the field of economic and social development

11. Outlined below is a summary of contributions received for this report from the United Nations system.

A. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

12. During the period from May 1999 to June 2000, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and OIC continued their cooperation in areas of common interest, such as food security, protection of the environment, water control, agricultural statistics, agricultural information systems, fisheries, appropriate technologies, as well as South-South cooperation between the member countries of both organizations within the framework of the special programme for food security. FAO was represented at the twenty-third session of the Islamic conference for economic cultural and social affairs, which was held at Jeddah from 22 to 26 January 2000.

13. During the reporting period, FAO organized two seminars with SESRTCIC. The first was a regional training seminar on characterization and analysis of range-dependent small ruminant production systems in the Near East region (Tunis, 8 to 12 November 1999). The other seminar was a training workshop on the impact of macroeconomics and sectoral policies on rural poverty in the Near East (Ankara, 28 February to 8 March 2000). The workshop was organized in collaboration with SESRTCIC and the Islamic Development Bank, with the participation of 25 experts from 13 member countries. The main issues presented and discussed included poverty assessment and measurement, economic reform, development policies and strategies, and policies for poverty alleviation.

B. International Fund for Agricultural Development

14. Since its inception, IFAD has continued to accord due consideration to the promotion of cooperation with OIC member countries which are both important contributors to IFAD resources and recipients of IFAD assistance. A cooperation agreement was signed between the two institutions on 21 March 1983. Since both parties aim to promote programmes related to agricultural development, the cooperation between OIC and IFAD involves the exchange of information and documents on questions of common interest, periodic consultations to promote joint cooperation programmes, and reciprocal representation in conferences or meetings at which questions of mutual interest are to be discussed.

15. In May 1979, IFAD and the Islamic Development Bank signed a cooperation agreement in order to achieve their objectives in assisting countries of common membership in their developmental activities. The agreement involves regular consultations on matters of mutual interest; exchange of information on potential projects related to their common objectives and provision of suggestions for participation in such projects; reciprocal representation in each organization's governing body; close cooperation in the identification, preparation and appraisal of development projects which are likely to be suitable for financial assistance from both organizations; and exchange of information on specific development projects in countries of common membership for which financing from both organizations appears necessary or suitable.

16. In July 1995, IFAD and ISESCO signed a cooperation agreement in order to promote agricultural and rural development objectives in Islamic countries that are members of both institutions. The cooperation agreement involves an exchange of information on issues of common interest, and periodical consultation to establish joint cooperation programmes and to review questions of mutual concern and reciprocal representation. IFAD has also maintained periodic contacts with SESRTCIC.

C. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

17. In cooperation with IDB, the secretariat of UNCTAD prepared three studies in connection with issues related to the World Trade Organization (WTO). These studies provided the basic documents for the consultative meeting of OIC in October 1999, which was attended by representatives of States members of OIC, the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry, WTO and UNCTAD. The conference discussed broad issues of interest to OIC countries and recommended priorities that could be included in the multilateral trade agenda of the third WTO ministerial conference.

D. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

18. During the past two years, UNESCO continued its cooperation with OIC and its subsidiary bodies, and in particular with ISESCO, the UNESCO counterpart in the OIC system. Cooperation with the OIC system included contacts at the highest level and participation in governing bodies. UNESCO and ISESCO signed, in March 1998 and May 2000, two programmes of activities for the bienniums 1998-1999 and 2000-2001, respectively. Through the biennial meeting of their joint commission and through visits and correspondence, the two organizations tried to refine their cooperation to better reflect and respond to the priorities of their member States that are also the priorities agreed upon in the general meetings of the United Nations and OIC, namely, education and eradication of illiteracy, development of science and technology, development of human resources and the environment.

19. In addition, the two organizations jointly planned, financed and implemented activities in cultural heritage, communication and informatics. The programme of activities for the biennium 2000-2001 includes 62 projects (jointly financed and implemented) covering the joint spheres of competence of the two organizations, with a clear emphasis on priority areas identified by the global conferences of the United Nations, that is, eradication of poverty, basic education, especially girls' education, and capacity-building in the field of information and communication technology. One area in which UNESCO and the OIC system are working jointly is the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (2001) and the issue of intercultural dialogue. Within this context, UNESCO and ISESCO are elaborating a project for an international exhibition on the scientific achievements of the Islamic civilization that will be shown in a number of capitals around the world.

E. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

20. A relationship agreement between UNIDO and OIC was signed in November 1996. UNIDO has actively cooperated with some OIC specialized and affiliated institutions. The discussion between UNIDO and ICCI on possible cooperation in the area of private sector development was intensified during 1999. This led to the agreement on holding a round-table meeting at Manama, Bahrain, on 7 May 2000, which brought together representatives from development finance institutions, investment promotion agencies and the

private sector as well as UNIDO, with a view to discussing issues of common interest and developing an action plan for future joint activities. UNIDO and ICCI signed a memorandum of understanding on future collaboration in several areas pertaining to investment and technology promotion. UNIDO is in the process of finalizing the action plan.

F. United Nations Population Fund

21. UNFPA has continued to provide technical assistance to most States members of OIC in which population activities, including reproductive health programmes and activities aimed at improving the status of women, are funded. A major follow-up to the most recent general meeting between the United Nations and OIC, which strengthened cooperation between UNFPA and OIC, was the signing of a memorandum of understanding, on 2 October 1998, by the Executive Director of UNFPA and the Secretary-General of OIC. As planned and discussed during the general meeting, UNFPA continued to cooperate with OIC through the funding of joint activities with ISESCO. These joint activities have resulted in the development of culture-sensitive material for use in Islamic teaching schools and other educational institutions.

22. Of particular interest was the convening, at Damascus in September 1999, of a regional training workshop on the ISESCO model curriculum guide for population education which was funded by UNFPA. The document provides ISESCO and its member countries with a framework for the introduction of population education from an Islamic perspective into school curricula. A change in attitudes towards reproductive rights and gender issues and a change in reproductive health practices were the major objectives of the workshop. Within the framework of their respective current programming cycle and action plan, UNFPA and ISESCO developed a joint project which is aimed at disseminating the manuals and guides previously produced, as well as creating awareness on the same subjects through the work of various departments of ISESCO and their outreach institutions.

G. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

23. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) enjoys the ongoing support of OIC in its efforts to provide essential services and humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees. In November 1998, a delegation from the Islamic Development Bank visited the West Bank field office to discuss the educational programme of UNRWA and the possibility of the Bank funding the UNRWA school infrastructure.

H. United Nations Children's Fund

24. In pursuance of the 1989 cooperation agreement between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and OIC and the 1996 memorandum of understanding signed between ISESCO and UNICEF, children's issues continue to be given high visibility on the political agenda of the Islamic world. UNICEF participated as an observer in the twenty-sixth session of OIC Foreign Ministers held in Burkina Faso in July 1999. The forthcoming ninth OIC summit conference, to be held in Qatar, will offer an excellent opportunity for UNICEF and OIC, in the light of the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit for Children, to be held in 2001, to rededicate their efforts to ensure the survival, protection, development and participation of children.

I. World Food Programme

25. The collaboration between WFP and OIC was formalized in October 1999 through a cooperation agreement which outlines the principles of cooperation, as well as certain measures that may promote cooperation and be a foundation for mutual assistance in matters of common interest. Cooperation between WFP and OIC is deemed most effective in the following priority areas: assistance to refugees; food security and agriculture; education and eradication of illiteracy; and human resource development. For future programming and implementation, there is scope for collaboration between WFP and the Islamic Development Bank in using its technical assistance for project appraisal and conducting feasibility studies of proposed projects.

26. In recent years, WFP has built a relatively strong vulnerability assessment and mapping capacity to improve targeting of resources and cost-effectiveness. WFP recognizes the potential for collaborating with SESRTCIC and will work towards establishing formal means for sharing data and information. Relief operations dominate WFP assistance in the OIC member countries, but providing the resources for this is a key concern. Possibilities of partnership with the Islamic Solidarity Fund for co-financing relief operations could be explored. In its strategy for supporting human resource development to improve food security among the vulnerable sections, the promotion of girls' education is a key element. WFP will work with ISESCO in this field. The memorandum of cooperation between OIC and WFP foresees reciprocal attendance at conferences and executive body sessions so as to encourage a dialogue and an understanding of priorities and issues of concern between the two organizations.

J. World Health Organization

27. WHO cooperates with ISESCO in several areas, such as health education, including the promotion of healthy life styles and control of alcohol and drug abuse, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), malaria, reproductive health and population issues, adolescent health and bioethics. The two organizations continued to promote the use of an action-oriented school health curriculum.

K. World Bank

28. The activities of the World Bank cover almost all countries of OIC. Such activities include project financing, technical assistance and other matters related to economic and social development in general. Cooperation between the World Bank and various OIC institutions is strong and is being increasingly enhanced by the continued direct contacts between the institutions concerned. This has already been manifested by the Bank's partial financing of a trade and investment conference organized by ICCI, as well as effective cooperation with ISESCO on matters related to knowledge management and strong cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank on project financing, training and information exchange. These activities will continue to be undertaken and will be further enhanced.

L. Other organizations, programmes and departments of the United Nations system

29. A number of other organizations, programmes and departments of the United Nations system, including the International Telecommunication Union, the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations University, the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Drug Control Programme, also conveyed information on their programmes and activities in cooperation with OIC and its specialized institutions.